

- Report No. 83
- March-April 1989

# Women's Concerns

## Report

## Incest

### Among Us Mennonites? Yes.

No one, with the exception of God, knows the extent of sexual abuse in the family of Mennonite denominations. I believe the incidence of incest among us could be that of the general population, based on my work as a psychotherapist and conversations with other professionals. Currently, this would mean that between one in six and one in three of us women have experienced unwanted sexual encounter with an adult before age 18 and one in three of our children may experience or be experiencing sexual abuse!

Intrafamilial sexual abuse, or incest, refers to family members involving children in sexual activity such as fondling and intercourse, exposure to pornography, voyeurism, and exhibitionism. Family includes parents, uncles, grandparents, surrogate parents, parent figures, siblings, cousins, etc.

### Incest—Sin? Yes.

Sexual abuse is sin. Seductive and exploitative, incest feeds off of children's innocence. Sexual abusers intrude on children's right to feel safe and to have a good night's sleep; they intrude on children's right to be curious; on their right to learn about sexuality without being eroticized; on their right to honesty and righteousness from adults.

Incest runs counter to Jesus' treatment of children. He took children in his arms and blessed them and encouraged adults to become as little children. Jesus saw righteousness as residing in relationships that were Godlike. He thought of God as Abba, Father who would not give a stone when children asked for bread. Jesus gave love, acceptance, understanding. He did not consider children sexual objects.



When the women of Jerusalem wept as Jesus carried his cross to Golgotha, he gave them permission to weep for themselves and their children and the hard times and suffering they would endure. Through this issue of *Women's Concerns Report* we can learn of the suffering caused by incest, claim Jesus blessing, and begin to work toward shalom in our homes and churches.

### Contents of this issue:

- Stories of Mennonite women who have dealt with incest.
- A list of 20 reasons for telling our stories of incest, compiled by women survivors of incest.
- A list of 10 reasons why victims resist telling their stories compiled by the same group of incest survivors.
- Ideas encouraging each reader to make a difference in helping to combat incest and sexual abuse.
- A condensed version of a sermon, "Shalom in the Family," by Clarice Kratz to the Joint Indiana-Michigan/Central District Conference.
- Guidelines for persons responding to victims of incest.
- An article, "Ministering to the Abused," by Carolyn Heggen.
- Eight vignettes, titled "What do you feel?, What do you think?, What would you do?"
- Three poems, reflecting my feelings while working with incest perpetrators who often minimize, rationalize, and pretend what they did is not that bad.
- Family dynamics of incest.
- A list of *Ways You Can Make a Difference*.
- A brief annotated bibliography and list of resources.

If you have been abused or know persons who have, or children who are being abused, you may contact Ethel Metzler, Carolyn Heggen, or Clarice Kratz. Ethel's address is: 211 Douglas East, Goshen, IN 46526; Carolyn's address is: 620 Ridgecrest SE, Albuquerque, NM 87108; Clarice's address is: 346 Maple Ave., Waukesha, WI 53186.

**Ethel Y. Metzler, compiler of this issue, is a member of Assembly Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind. A psychotherapist who works at Family Counseling Services, Elkhart, Ind., she developed a program for working with families who experience sexual abuse. She has led a group of incest survivors for the past six years and is interested in the experiences of Mennonite women. She welcomes correspondence.**

### **Ten Reasons Why Victims Resist Telling Their Incest Stories**

**1. Fear of being the object of attention; fear of being questioned; fear of not being believed; fear of rejection, abandonment, death; fear of the breakup of the family.**

**2. Worry that now is not a good time to tell. Having kept it so long, the abused person wonders what good would come from telling the secret now and cannot come up with a rational reason for telling.**

**3. Concern about privacy. The abused persons feels very private about the incest and believes no one else ever had this happen.**

The MCC Committee on Women's Concerns *REPORT* USPS 367-790 is published bimonthly jointly by Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Peace Section, 21 South 12th Street, Akron, PA 17501 and by MCC Canada Peace and Social Concerns, 134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg, MB R3T 5K9. Second-class postage paid at Akron, PA.

## **Journey of Reconciliation**

"I was sexually abused by a relative when I was eight years old." Even as I said those words, I didn't quite believe it was all right to call my experience "abuse", much less make such a confession to a group of women I didn't know. Each woman in this group seemed to have a more valid story than I. At age 28, I was still blaming myself for not preventing this from happening to me. This confession began an intense time of acknowledging that the abuse happened, of admitting to family dysfunction, of confronting my abuser, and of healing.

The fact that this had happened to me was so deeply buried that for years I wasn't consciously aware that it had happened, though now I recognize some recurring dreams as an attempt of my subconscious to bring the issue to the surface. I was nurtured in a Christian home. The fear of my father's anger, and the embarrassment I would cause our family by revealing my story kept me silenced. I felt our small, rural "Christian" community would be merciless with the knowledge. And so I kept my secret.

Through my silence I did not connect my discomfort with men, lack of dating throughout high school and college, and difficulty in relating to a spiritual, "male" God, with my abuse experience.

After earning a degree in education, I began a two-year Mennonite Voluntary Service assignment. Here I began embracing God as female and finally began feeling love and acceptance from my Creator. Here layers of cover-up began to crack—when an interaction with a male VS housemate left me feeling "raped." He had taken upon himself the mission of releasing several household members from their "stoic Mennonite sexuality." While seeking assistance in conflict resolution around this experience, I again felt "raped" of support from a claimed "feminist" support committee member. Now who could I trust? Not men? Not women? And still no one knew I had been sexually abused.

Interestingly enough, the healthiest male relationship to that point happened with another male household member. I finally felt treated like an intelligent human being. Still, I bade him farewell fairly determined never to get married.

Several months later, circumstances led to finishing my VS assignment in another city, where I met the man who is now my husband. It was here that some health problems that had begun during the first year of VS heightened, and were misdiagnosed. It was recommended by one doctor that I seek counseling, which I did. This would have been a prime opportunity to deal with my abuse. However, the counseling never got beyond basic issues of forgiveness and being forgiven, and culminated when I wrote a letter of forgiveness and apology to some people on my first year VS support committee who had subjected me to unfounded character judgments. At that point the (male) counselor didn't see a need for me to be further counseled. Since then, my understanding of grace and forgiveness has led me to regret sending that letter.

I still find myself amazed that my friendship with the man who would be my husband continued to grow during this time. As our relationship progressed and our physical intimacy increased, the cracks of cover-up widened further. A month and a half before our wedding I told him about my abuse (the first person with whom I had ever confided my story), expecting rejection. I wasn't rejected! However,



4. Anxiety about explicitness. The abused person imagines others will be very upset should she talk about the details and does not know which of the details would cause others anxiety. (Notice how minimized are the details in the stories presented here.)

5. Distress about crying. The abused person thinks that, should she begin to cry, she will be unable to stop, overwhelmed with feelings.

6. Anticipation that others will judge her. The incest victim believes that she will be criticized for not telling earlier, for going along with the abuse, for not knowing that she should have known better.

7. Worry about being overwhelmed with guilt and shame. Having lived with these two emotions all her life, the incest victim feels intense panic that the guilt and shame will destroy her.

8. Frustration about how to protect her family. The incest victim worries about protecting the person who abused her from criticism of others. She in some way has come to accept this weakness and fault in the abuser and she believes others will not be able to see anything except the wickedness.

wedding plans, and then health circumstances, temporarily buried the issue again. My health problems were resolved three months later when my chronically infected appendix was removed after it had burst.

Further schooling for my husband meant another move. And with this move, the abuse issue jumped from the back burner to the front in a roaring boil. Part of the fact that the issue came to a head then, I think, has to do with the type of relationship my husband and I have. He managed to break through many barriers I had built up against men. This forced me to face the root of my mistrust and defensiveness.

During marital counseling for communication, it became clear I had some personal agenda to deal with. Once again I "confessed" what happened. I was then referred to a women's support group—group therapy with occasional individual counseling.

At my first group meeting, each woman prefaced her "story" with, "I was sexually abused when..." When my turn came, I began with the first statement of this article, calling my experience abuse for the first time in my life. Thus began the journey of naming my abuse, letting my feelings out, and regaining strength, security, and trust in myself.

Though our family is scattered, we have regular family gatherings. This means seeing my abuser regularly. I knew now I couldn't live a lie any longer, pretending nothing had happened when this had affected my life so profoundly. Family relationships are important to me; I knew I had to confront him. I wanted to be reconciled with the person who had been a trusted playmate and one to whom I had looked up.

Distance allowed the safety net of letter writing. I wrote a series of three letters: In the first letter I inquired as to his memory of what happened those years of my childhood. He responded positively, acknowledging what had happened, apologizing, and expressing interest in reconciliation. Receiving that letter was a major step in my healing process. In the second letter, I shared some of my memories, feelings, and mutual interest in reconciliation. In the third letter, I mentioned negative family system patterns, inquiring whether he had ever been mistreated in such a way. He didn't respond to the second and third letters.

In the meantime, after confronting my abuser, I gained a sense of peace and self-security I had never known in my life. God has been a patient, healing presence in my life. That doesn't answer why I, or anyone else, has to deal with such an experience.

Initially, I felt very dependent on the group and therapy process, and had energy for little else. These women were extremely important support and sounding boards. Between the first and second letter, my husband and I made adjustments to an unplanned pregnancy, when we had seriously been talking about not having children. Then we dealt with the grief and disappointment of a miscarriage. By the second letter, I had covered a lot of mileage. I began to realize frustrations with the group and leader—a sign of weaning. Power had been returned to me by writing the letters to my abuser. This helped me see the imperfections even in a healing agent. And so, by letter three, I confronted the group leader, and later the group itself, about my frustration with some of the group processing.

Recently, I had the privilege of a private conversation with my abuser. Just prior to receiving my letters, his own journey of healing had begun. Though it was difficult for him to receive my letters in the midst of such critical self-examination, he came to understand my true intent of those letters. After our discussion I feel the issue is laid to rest in my life; that now I can refocus and begin rebuilding relationships and new images of myself.

Life is taking some new turns for me: 1) Vulnerability doesn't have to lead to being a victim, and the unknown can be exciting; 2) My faith has grown deeply by realizing anew the God-given ability to choose how to respond to situations beyond our control without bending to cultural and "Christian" mores.

The church has not been very helpful in my healing process. I feel strongly that lack of positive involvement in working with sexuality is a significant detriment to the church reaching people. Though I shared brief sketches of my story with our adult Sunday school class and a small church group, only my pastor and one woman from the small group ever talked to me again about this part of my faith journey. Though my journey has put stress on our marriage,

9. Panic about others getting wrong ideas about herself and feeling that she may not know who she is after she tells them about the abuse.

10. Hysteria that the abuse really was as bad as she thought and has tried to avoid knowing. If the person begins to recount the story she fears that those who hear it will reflect back to her how awful it really is. It is precisely this feeling that she has tried to avoid experiencing over the years.

#### Guidelines for Persons Responding to Victims of Incest

1. Believe victims; be wary of persons who are nonsupportive or who minimize the abuse.
2. Validate feelings of victims and all family members. Insure victims that what happened was not their fault.

3. Assist families and victims to know their options, to make choices, and to follow state mandates for reporting to Child Protective Services.
4. Refer families to appropriate services; family sexual abuse treatment programs, sexual assault services, law enforcement agencies, medical services, legal services, clergy services.

5. Provide support, being accepting and caring, as you offer to mediate God's grace and spiritual gifts.
6. Do not do therapy—unless you are trained in sexual abuse therapy.
7. Find support. Consult with professionals experienced in treatment. Share your emotional responses with a professional, a peer, or a spiritual director.
8. Discover resources in your community to train, consult, and provide advocacy. Use

my husband has been more supportive than I could ever ask. At least I have had individuals who have extended support and encouragement to me; he has had virtually no on-going support through this.

Sexuality is still considered a "dirty," taboo subject by the "Christian" church which has not dealt with it well enough. This is too bad because the woman who has *not* experienced incest, date rape, molestation, or other forms of sexual abuse is probably more the exception than the rule. That means neither male nor female are being nurtured as to how to express their sexual feelings, or taught how the expression of their sexuality is so intricately webbed into their spirituality and whole being.

Had I read an article such as this a year ago, I would have been skeptical and incredulous about such an outcome. My hope is that this article can be a support and encouragement to those of you walking a similar journey.

The author wishes to remain anonymous.

by Ethel Yake Metzler

## Three Cynical Poems

These poem pieces reflect attitudes of abusers and, too often, attitudes of pastors and the church community.

### Poem One

Abusers say:

Speak the unspeakable, if you must,  
but not aloud,  
and not yet.

Only when I'm ready,  
and don't expect me  
to tell you  
when.

don't expect me  
to tell you  
how.

And I reserve the right  
to tell you whether  
what you say  
is true,  
acceptable,  
or unlikely.

### Poem Two

Abusers say:

Speak to me only if  
you do not blame me.

I cannot take your blame.  
I shall explain,  
I shall deny,  
I shall justify.

But I will not be to blame.

For I am not to blame.

What could you blame me for?

For acting on urges  
I don't understand?

For being like other men?

For seeing you as female?

For wanting attention?  
Affection?  
Sexual interaction?

Tell me you understand and accept me.

Tell me "it" wasn't that bad.

Tell me "it" never happened.

And I'll be satisfied.

these yourself, inform your church, and assist victims and their families to utilize appropriate resources for information, treatment, and problem-solving related to the consequences of sexual abuse. 9. Become informed about state regulations regarding reporting incest, sexual abuse, and family rape. Make certain your minister and all those concerned with any family who has experienced sexual abuse know these regulations.

10. Make certain that your minister does not shortchange the perpetrator by believing in the quick confession and promise-to-quit offenders often use to quiet the accusations against them. Offenders need competent treatment by therapists qualified to evaluate and treat sexual compulsiveness, sexual addiction, and sexual

perversion. Confession and promise, good as they may be, are inadequate to assist the perpetrator to gain understanding and control over the behavior and contributing factors which created the abuse.

#### Incest Survivors' Twenty Reasons for Telling Their Stories

1. So others will have hope for recovery.
2. So others may be given help.

3. So others will protect children.
4. So people will understand—not necessarily make allowances—but understand the impact of sexual abuse.
5. So the survivor can receive affirmation of her personhood.
6. So the survivor can break the power of secret she carried for the family.
7. So the survivor can claim what happened to her openly as part of her history.

Believe me,

It's OK  
to explain "it" all away;  
to deny "it" could cause  
you harm;  
to trivialize "its" importance;  
to forget "it" ever happened.

Why make "it" a big deal?

#### Poem Three

Abusers say:

I don't know what  
they are talking about—  
these women who complain  
about incest.

Don't they know the  
statistics: One  
out of three of them and  
one out of six of us men  
will be abused  
sexually  
before age eighteen.

So what's the big deal?

Better within the family  
than from outside.

Right?

Better by someone you know  
than by someone unknown.

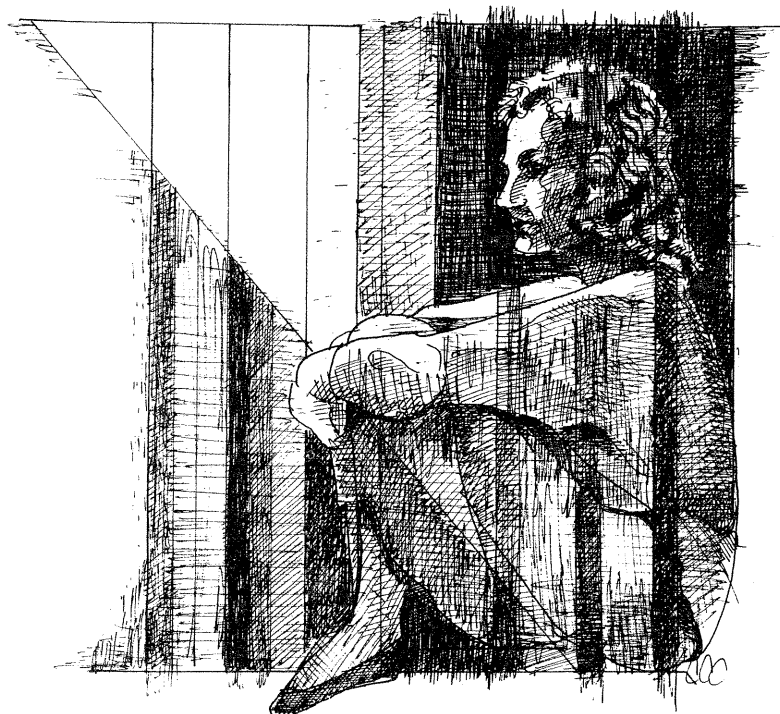
Right?

Better by your cousin  
than your uncle.

Right?

Better by your uncle  
than your brother.

Right?



Better by your brother  
than your father.

Right?

Better by an alcoholic father  
than a religious father.

Right?

Better when you're young  
and hardly remember  
than when you are older  
Right?

Better by someone who was gentle  
than by someone who raped you.

Right?

Better to you, a female,  
than to your brother.

Right?

Don't complain. Be happy.

8. So the survivor can give the shame and guilt she carried back to the perpetrator whose responsibility it really is.  
9. So the survivor can begin to have a clear mind.  
10. So the survivor can use energy positively rather than using it to fight with the past trauma.  
11. So the survivor can begin to discover how normal grown-up experiences should be.

12. So the survivor can sleep well.  
13. So the survivor can deal with compulsive behaviors, such as eating disorders that plague her.

14. So the survivor can find others who have had similar experiences and discover what are the common consequences of sexual abuse.  
15. So the survivor can quit vacillating between believing and not believing the abuse happened to her.  
16. So the survivor can get the weight of anger, fear, silence off her chest and begin breathing normally.  
17. So the survivor can understand her sexuality and how she has been affected by

the abuse.  
18. So the survivor can develop a sense of a true self and not rely exclusively on her functional self.  
19. So the survivor can feel fully loved by God and fully loved by herself.  
20. So the survivor can open up the possibility of the abuser finding healing through confession and asking for forgiveness and seeking appropriate group and individual therapy.

by Clarice Kratz

## In Search of Shalom

*This article, adapted from a sermon, "Shalom in the Family," was presented to a joint session of the Indiana-Michigan Conference and the Central District Conference, April, 1987.*

God, in our time, has "seen the affliction of people and heard their cry because of their taskmasters; God knows their sufferings and has come down to deliver them." (Ex. 3:7-8) A modern exodus has begun, an exodus of abused and broken people out of homes which have become oppressive and violent.

Never before has such widespread attention been given to relieving the enormous suffering of women, children, and some men, at the hands of their own family members, by which women and children run the greatest risk of incest, sexual abuse, assault, physical injury, and murder.

"In Search of Shalom" suggests an ongoing search for wholeness in relationships. There is hope! The Old Testament declares God's will for shalom—a world at peace. The New Testament proclaims that Christ has made peace possible by breaking down the walls of hostility that separate people from God and from each other. We are called to be peacemakers in our homes in our own time—to destroy the dividing walls of hostility.

Mennonites are fortunate in that shalom teaching is woven through our theology, challenging us to become shalom persons—persons in whose lives Christ has intervened. As we search for shalom, healing for ourselves and for each other becomes actualized. I know this in my own life and with my family of origin.

I experienced abuse as a child in my home, and I know I am not the only victim of abuse in the Mennonite Church. Each time I speak about my own experience or my ministry, Mennonite pastors relate similar stories. In my family I was a victim of verbal, physical, and sexual abuse. I grew up in an alcoholic home. I am the youngest of six children.

My father was excommunicated by the Mennonite Church for joining the Lion's Club around the time I was born. There may have been other reasons for the church's decision, but that was the publicized reason. No one talked about it.

My mother couldn't control my dad or bring him back into church fellowship. This greatly affected our family. As I grew up my parents grew further and further apart. My mother's frustrations were expressed on to me through severe punishment. I was a very spirited child and she needed something in her life she could control.

As Mennonites, our greatest challenge may be to admit our problems. We have an extraordinary ability to persuade ourselves that we are among the best-behaved and best-regulated people.

My mother certainly got that message and proceeded to see that this spirited individual also learned it. In those days, her style of discipline was called punishment. Today, it would be seen as child abuse. In my father's rejection by the church, he turned to horses and a riding club. My mother used one of his horsewhips to punish me; my brother used my body for his pleasure.

Yet our family problems remained secret. I remember many trips to church arguing with my mother (I didn't see why I had to go if Dad didn't), but, when we got to the church door, no one could tell—or so we hoped.

I believe that Mennonites hide and deny family problems in an effort to live up to the myth of the perfect Christian family. But we can't destroy the "dividing wall of hostility" until we recognize that it exists. To make peace, we must first acknowledge our problems, our sins, our family conflicts.

These years greatly affected my early adult life and my relationship with my parents and the church. It took a long time to move away from blaming them for my problems, but I eventually realized, through treatment, that as an adult I could take responsibility for myself, my identity, and I could move on with my life. I couldn't go back and change what had happened, but I could move on.



**Resolution De-escalating  
Violence In Our Family**

**We want to break the silence about the presence of domestic violence in our homes. We acknowledge the use of physical, sexual, and emotional violence to control others. We commit ourselves to: 1) name the problem of domestic**



**violence whenever it occurs; 2) offer protection and support to the victims; 3) lovingly confront the abusers; 4) assist in the healing process in appropriate ways for both victims and abusers.**

Today that is called moving from thinking of oneself as a victim to becoming a survivor. I am an adult survivor who has taken responsibility for her life and made peace with her parents and the church. When my mother was dying of cancer ten years ago, I took care of her in my home. We were able to heal and forgive. In this one last step, I got the approval from her I so desperately needed.

Since her death, I've also come to realize how very, very unhappy and disappointed mother was. Gifted, she didn't understand her potential, and never had the opportunity to cultivate it.

We Mennonites work hard at hiding our family problems. In our search for shalom—to be shalom persons—we must acknowledge that conflict exists in our families. I was taught that to be angry was to sin. We have work to do to interpret “be angry and sin not” in a helpful way, disassociating anger from violence, holding grudges, and withdrawal of love.

We can learn to assert ourselves in healthy ways when we feel anger or disagree with someone. We can teach children to assert themselves when adults, whether siblings or parents, want to touch them sexually, abuse them physically, or hurt them emotionally. This means giving our children permission to know what is inappropriate behavior and helping them know the difference between niceness as a facade and genuine care and love.

*What are the consequences when we hide our problems?*

—The more we attempt to hide problems, the more we encourage dishonesty. Keeping family secrets is teaching dishonesty to our children. We need to expose problems and bring them to Jesus for confession and healing.

—The more we hide our problems, the more likely it is that we teach children violence is their due.

—I grew up assuming I deserved the punishment and sexual abuse I was getting. That only gave me low self-esteem and encouraged negative behaviors. It wasn't until, as an adult, I could name the punishment and incest child abuse that I could heal and grow toward shalom and forgive.

—The more we hide our problems, the more likely it is other victims do not receive help.

—The more we hide our problems, the more likely it is relationships are damaged beyond repair; marriages break down; brothers and sisters don't speak.

—The more we hide our problems, the more likely it is persons who escape family abuse and hostility by leaving the abuse and dysfunctional family, also leave the church.

—The more we hide our problems, the more likely it is children raised in this environment perpetuate similar problems in their adult families.

—The more we hide our problems, the more likely it is that the church is actually teaching violence—that abuse rather than shalom is acceptable.

*What can we do?*

—Educate, evaluate, question. Ask: Do we teach mutuality, inclusiveness, respect for all—or patriarchal values that suggest that what males say and do is acceptable no matter how ungodlike.

—Teach that hitting and spanking children is not the intended meaning of Prov. 13:24: “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.” This has been interpreted to mean hitting is necessary to teach children, to discipline them. The opposite is true. The shepherd's rod was not used to hit sheep. Sheep wander; the shepherd uses the rod to guide them. Sheep do not need to be beaten; they obey when they are led.

I remember a time when I couldn't imagine parenting without spanking. Yet I knew how the whip felt to me. I often hear the question, “When do you believe spanking is okay?” (The films and books of Dobson and La Hay, which are so popular among some Christians, encourage spanking.) I ask in return, “Why are we so dead set on hitting children? Why is spanking, hitting, or beating good for children, and not for adults?”

The answer is, they are not. When does hitting become abusive? It is always abusive. Hitting children teaches them that hitting is okay. Hitting and spanking teach violence—abuse of the weak by the strong. The challenge for Christians is to learn nonviolent ways of parenting.

*[Additionally, spanking on the buttocks stimulates the pubococcygeus muscle, which supports our genitalia, and associates sexual arousal with violence and pain. — Compiler.]*





#### Sample Public Service Radio Announcement

"Incest. Is this happening in your family? It does happen to approximately a quarter of a million children in the U.S. each year. The abusers are not strangers in the park. Three out of four sexually abused children know their offender.

"You can help. Talk to your children. Tell them 'no one has the right to touch you in ways that make you afraid or uncomfortable. If this happens, tell me, and I'll try to help.'

"If you need help, more information, or suspect that a child you know is being sexually abused, call . This is part of a program of education for the prevention of sexual abuse."

—Look for resources to educate about family violence. Check with the Task Force on Domestic Violence and the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. Use this issue of *Women's Concerns Report* to open up discussions in your congregation.

—Check with community agencies to discover what education they can offer to your church.

—Seek out training at your YWCA and become a support volunteer to victims.

—Learn to recognize symptoms of abuse.

—Support family members who are trying to change unhealthy relationships. Let them know you care and are willing to walk with them even if you hear some uncomfortable things.

—Find counseling, therapy, financial assistance, and resources appropriate for referrals. Not all agencies are helpful. Explore, visit, check them out. Talk openly about therapy and treatment.

—Recognize that separation from family may be necessary for healing. Painful for me as an adult in therapy, I needed to separate from my parents and siblings for my healing process. It was almost never heard of in my Mennonite community who considered it betrayal of my family.

—Encourage those who abuse women and children to join programs to learn ways to express their anger healthily. Learn conflict resolution and assertiveness skills.

—Acknowledge abuse problems in sermons and in Sunday school to give both adults and children permission to talk about them.

—Develop family nurturing and sexuality programs.

—Nurture and support each other. Particularly where help may be unavailable, women can seek training to assist those who have been abused. Women pastors can play an important role giving women permission to trustingly deal with abuse.

—Open our homes to each other for fellowship and fun time. As a child I spent Sundays in friends' homes where I saw how healthy and enjoyable family life could be.

Accepting our weaknesses as a church and moving on to honesty in relationships will cultivate new strengths and healthy families for our mission and church growth.

For me family has become a context for salvation: a significant arena in which God's life-giving, renewing, healing work goes on as I have tried to help each child have a happy satisfying experience, not without conflict, but with a family who faces life and deals with it in a positive way: feeling together, caring together, crying together.

I strive to be the person God intends me to be. As my life is constantly growing, developing, and changing, I am developing my uniqueness as a woman and accepting the awesome responsibility to help others begin that process. I've learned that my growth comes in the midst of facing pain, being Christ's servant and washing the feet and wounds of others. Amen.

#### Postscript

As proof that empowerment comes through telling our stories there is a postscript to my story. As a result of preparing for and telling my story to the joint conference in April, 1987, I developed the courage to confront the sibling who had sexually abused me.

The experience was positive, with my brother acknowledging full responsibility for his behavior. I had had no way of knowing whether he would accept responsibility for his actions. But I knew after I had told my story and felt acceptance by many persons that I was then ready to address the abuse with him—no matter what his response.

I was able to tell him I no longer hated him, but I didn't know if I could ever love him.

In these 40 years he had read about the issue, seen TV specials, and had come to realize that he had hurt many people. He had suffered much and was now ready for this step of ownership and his own healing process.

I chose to forgive him and continue on with my healing process as wounds heal, reopen, and heal again.



## Resources

### Books for Adults and Professionals

*Abuse and Religion, When Praying Isn't Enough*, by Anne L. Horton and Judith A. Williamson, eds. Lexington: Lexington Books, 1988. Expert advice from professionals for guiding religious leaders in their work with abused and abusive individuals and families.

*The Best Kept Secret, Sexual Abuse of Children*, by Florence Rush. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1980. An expose of beliefs and attitudes toward women and men across the centuries which condoned sexual abuse of children.

*Child Sexual Abuse, A Handbook for Clergy and Church Members*, by Lee W. Carlson. Valley Forge: Pilgrim Press, 1988. A brief but very useful guide for pastors dealing with child sexual abuse within the church. Excellent, up-to-date listing of books, films, and videos.

*Child Sexual Abuse: A Hope for Healing*, by Maxine Hancock and Karen Mains. Wheaton: Harold Shaw, 1987. An intense probing of the topic from a Christian perspective and through the stories of women, victims turned survivors.

I am deeply grateful to the joint conference body of Central District and Indiana/Michigan Conferences for offering me the gift to address this issue through telling my story.

Even though I do not encourage telling our stories necessarily to large audiences, I do attest to the healing and grace given to me in speaking openly of my experience. It is my hope that I may challenge all of us to honor God and ourselves as we seek shalom in sharing stories, our pain, our faith, and our healing with each other.

**Clarice Kratz co-pastors the Mennonite Fellowship, 346 Maple Ave., Waukesha, Wis., directs a women's shelter, and serves on the Task Force on Domestic Violence of the two conferences. She has helped to develop the Wisconsin Children's Fund to provide adequate legal representation for children at risk of sexual abuse.**

by Carolyn Holderread Heggen

## Ministering to the Abused

Most of us know and grimly accept the circulating statistics about sexual abuse in North America:

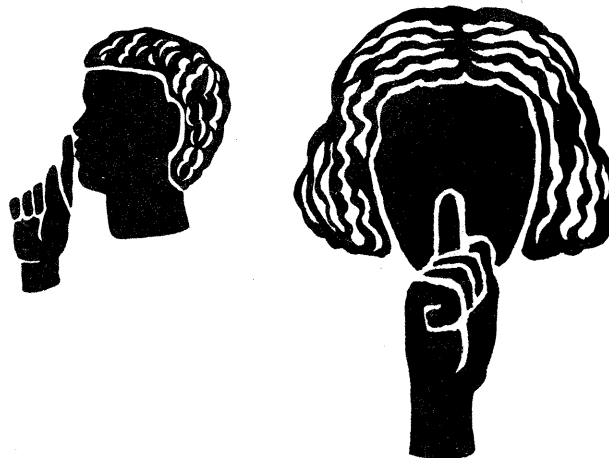
- 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 7 boys will be sexually abused by the time they reach 18;
- 90% of the abuse will be committed by someone known to the victim;
- 50% will be committed by someone in the victim's family;
- 1 out of 6 females are the victims of incest.

What most of us as Mennonites and Brethren in Christ can *not* believe, however, is that incestuous abuse is an issue in our denominations. We of course are sinners, but certainly not of that stripe. I have spent countless hours listening to dozens of women raised in our churches share their stories of sexual abuse in their childhood homes and their difficult struggles to find healing and wholeness as adults. My clinical belief is that the rate of sexual abuse in our denomination and most others may parallel that in the general population.

Only a few women I have counseled have been able, either as young victims or adult survivors, to share their pain with pastors or members of their local congregation. Only now are congregations becoming places where we are comfortable talking about healthy sexuality. Most congregations still find sexual abuse in the home too discomforting to consider and focus their sexuality teachings on the evils of premarital sex, adultery, and homosexuality. Incestuous abuse has become the unmentionable sin.

By their silence our churches communicate that they don't want to know about sexual abuse. Our pretense that it doesn't exist reinforces victims' sense of isolation, despair, and rejection. When it is an issue that is never acknowledged in our congregations, imagine the fear and shame a victim experiences when she considers going to church for help. Most victims cannot surmount the church's wall of silence and turn elsewhere for the support and counsel they so desperately need.

In listening to accounts of sexual abuse, it is apparent that congregations have been unable to helpfully dialogue with victims and their families. When I ask victims if they have ever shared their story with a pastor or a Sunday school teacher or church member the response is usually some version of, "Oh no, I could never do that." Reference is often made to the fact that no personal sexual issues are ever discussed in their congregation, or to the sense that no one else in the church has ever had this problem, or to the humiliation of letting the people in the church discover how disturbed their family is. Victims who are able to tell a non-offending parent about their abuse were often warned to never let anyone in the church know.



***The Courage to Heal, A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse*, by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis. New York: Harper and Row, 1988. An excellent and thorough guide for women who have been abused and the persons in their support networks, whether spouses, pastors, family, or friends. Also available on two audio cassettes.**

***I Never Told Anyone, A Collection of Writings by Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse*, by Ellen Bass and Louise Thornton. New York: Harper and Row, 1986. Testimonies in prose and poetry from more than thirty survivors.**

***Incest, A Psychological Study of Causes and Effects with Treatment Recommendations*, by Karin C. Meiselman. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1978. One of the first comprehensive descriptions of incest based on clinical studies. Still useful for professionals.**

One Mennonite victim was told, "If anyone finds out, your father will be sent to jail and our family will be ruined forever." Another was told, "If anyone from the church ever finds out about this we'll have to leave and never come back." But the muffled cries of abused people in our congregations are becoming harder to ignore. As incest becomes more openly discussed outside the church, victimized members (and perhaps victimizers who want to deal with their sin) are wanting and expecting the church to share in the process of their healing.

What are the long term scars of victims? Because for most victims there was no help for them as children, as adults they have a strong sense of unfinished business. They may have unresolved grief for the healthy, wholesome relationship they never had with the abusive family member. Some may have unresolved anger toward God and the church "for letting this happen to me" and may experience a faith crisis in adult years when they face their abuse. In the words of one woman, now an active member of the congregation where she was raised, "I'm very angry at the people in our congregation for not protecting me when I was little and helpless; I don't know if I can ever trust and love them again. How could they not see we were a sick, sick family and that I was hurting inside and out?"

Other issues that adult survivors may struggle with include sexual difficulties related to fear of both physical and emotional intimacy. Adults who were victimized as children may avoid sexual relations altogether or may engage in indiscriminate sexual activity because of a confusion between sex and affection or because they see themselves as defiled and bad. As one victim explains, "By the time I left home at 18 I saw myself as totally damaged merchandise and spent the next 25 years proving that to myself and everyone else." It is no surprise that depression and low self-esteem and sense of worth are ongoing struggles for many survivors.

What can congregations do to more effectively minister to the sexually wounded among us and to help prevent further abuse in our homes? My suggestions include:

1. Claim our sexuality as an integral part of our lives which, like other aspects of who we are, must be under the accountability and discipline of the Holy Spirit and other believers. By not owning and embracing our sexuality it becomes split off and more likely to operate without the constraints of personal and corporate scrutiny.

2. Learn to own and accept our dark and shadowy side. It's dangerous to think, "That wasn't really me, that was my old, carnal nature or the devil." By acknowledging the dark part of who I am and incorporating it into my conscious self, it is less likely to break through, out of control, in sinful, destructive ways such as sexual abuse. That which is unconscious and unclaimed cannot be dealt with.

3. Teach and preach that sexual abuse of children is wrong. While there is not specific biblical injunction prohibiting fathers from sexually abusing their sons or daughters (the prohibitions against incest refer specifically to sexual contact with a female who is the "property" of another man and seem concerned with the violation of male property rights), the practice is wrong because it exploits, because it misuses the power and authority of the adult role, because it breaks children's trust, and because it shows complete disregard for the well-being of children, causing serious, long-lasting emotional and spiritual problems for the victims.

4. Teach that obedience to parents is conditionally "in the Lord" (Eph. 6:1). Children need to know that the biblical injunction to obey parents does *not* mean they must submit to sexual abuse.

5. Dispel the idea that what happens in our homes is private and no one else's business. Our Anabaptist vision of the church includes a strong emphasis on mutual discipleship and accountability. This cannot happen in an atmosphere of secrecy. We are called to care for each other, regardless of familial boundaries. When one of us is wounded, the entire church suffers.

6. Combat popular Christian models of family structure that place fathers in positions of ultimate authority over women and children and require unilateral submission and obedience. Anything that we do to empower women and children reduces their likelihood of being sexually abused in the home.

7. Work together in congregations to encourage healthy models of male psychology and socialization. Traditionally, adult male sexual identity is achieved by repudiating the basic identification with the mother. The qualities associated with mothering—nurturance, tenderness, emotional responsiveness—tend to be suppressed. The results are often a socialization and psychology in which dominance and sexuality are confused and the capacity for caretaking atrophies. This sets the groundwork for

***Incest and Sexuality: A Guide to Understanding and Healing***, by Wendy Maltz and Beverly Holman. Lexington: Lexington Books, 1986. Help for survivors and their partners, recognizing the impact of incest on both.

***Incest, Understanding and Treatment***, by Romeena C. Renshaw. Boston: Little Brown, 1982. A physicians noncondemnatory approach to clinical management of incest.

***Kiss Daddy Goodnight***, by Louise Armstrong. New York: Hawthorn, 1978. Poignant accounts of incest experiences and responses.

***Outgrowing the Pain***, by Eliana Gil. San Francisco: Launch Press, 1983. A book documenting the possibility of recovery from sexual abuse.

***Sexual Assault and Abuse, A Handbook for Religious Professionals***, by Mary O. Pellauer, Barbara Chester, and Jane Boyajian. New York: Harper and Row, 1987. An essential guide for the religious professional who encounters the patterns and consequences of sexual abuse in their ministry.

***Sexual Violence, the Unmentionable Sin; An Ethical and Pastoral Perspective***, by Marie Marshall Fortune. New York, Pilgrim Press, 1983. A comprehensive examination of the roots of sexual violence and a pastoral perspective offering tools and resources for practical response. One of the earliest treatments from the perspective of the church and still one of the best.

potential abuse. Congregations should provide many models of males caring for and teaching young children, helping with potlucks, emotionally responding in warmth, tenderness, vulnerability and tears to those around them.

8. Raise the consciousness of members by talking about the problem of sexual abuse in our homes. By sharing information and personal stories of abuse, the wall of silence will begin to crumble and members will be better prepared to begin ministering to the abused. Congregations can learn to listen, to care and to lovingly walk the painful journey to healing with the sexually abused among us.

Carolyn Holderread Heggen, a psychotherapist, is a member of the Mennonite Church in Albuquerque, N.M., mother of three, and enrolled in a doctoral program in counseling at the University of New Mexico. This article was reprinted by permission of the author from *Shalom! A Journal for the Practice of Reconciliation*, edited by Harriet Bicksler, published by the Brethren in Christ Church.

## A Parable— A Continuing Story of...

*This parable is born out of two cousins' struggle to survive. It is told in the hope that abusive cycles, once identified and combatted, may be overcome. In this sense it is a continuing story, all too familiar to our world, in which we all share the responsibility to add new chapters of hope.*

Once upon a time two men noted the same thing. At a very early age their daughters were showing signs of being very strong willed. This would never do. If their daughters were to become proper, marriageable women they would have to be much more pliable, submissive.

The two men loved their daughters, and, taking the young toddlers best interests at heart, at least in their very male-centered eyes, they did something unspeakable. Something which would only have to be done once. With a military trainer's sense of unpleasant, even disgusting, duty, they both accomplished the deed. And how did they sleep at nights? Well, one easier than the other for he had a stronger line of training in doing what had to be done. Besides, kids that age don't remember anything! Or so the subconscious minds of the two men fervently hoped. For they loved their daughters, in their very male-centered way.

And it seemed to work. The two girls rebelled in small ways and blew up every now and then. But, on the whole, they fit the mold of "good little girls" quite well. But something wasn't quite right. Oh, nothing blatant that the two men would even notice consciously, but they could never rest at ease. Why so minimal a feeling? Because the two girls, at times, opened the doors a crack to a friend or two but it was slammed shut. Slammed shut by those who were too scared, didn't want to believe, didn't want to talk, didn't want to listen, and many other didn'ts.

Yet somewhere in the subconscious of these little girls was the idea planted by a loving Creator that what had been created was good, not bad, to be controlled. And that little spark couldn't be killed. It kept struggling to come out.

So the two "little girls," once grown, left home. And ended up far from home, not in conscious rebellion, but with subconscious glimmers of hope to survive. And survive they both did, each in separate worlds which met but infrequently.

One day something happened which was to open the eyes of one of the "little girls," then 28, and eventually touch the lives of the two men who loved her in their very male-centered eyes. The seed of pliable submissiveness had prepared the soil for others' monster deeds. This adult "little girl" had noted that she just couldn't yell when in a lot of pain. There were also times when she should have said no, put a stop to it, when she simply could not. Frustrated, angry, blaming herself for years, the adult "little girl" put it down to stupidity, lack of will. But a little spark within didn't rest at ease. Then it happened.

One day, walking home from class... there were six boys... roughly tripped onto the ground.... kicked from many sides... scared... only four houses from home... scream?... yet somewhere inside a knowledge that a scream would die on her lips... So she talked... and talked... and not too much happened.

Later that night when safe at home, a housemate was frustrated with her for not screaming. Feeling stupid, guilty, masochistic, the young woman ran to her own room and alone tried to find comfort. In a small corner of her unconscious mind, a loving Creator planted an idea, an idea which caused the little spark to fan a bit brighter. And one day... one day... the spark would give birth. Not to a fire storm! But to its own place alongside a world of other lights which reflect a Creator's glory.

**For Educators and Parents**

***A Better Safe Than Sorry Book***, by Sol and Judith Gordon. Fayetteville: Ed U Press, 1984. A guide to help parents talk to their children (ages three to nine) about sexual abuse prevention. To be read with children.

***Sexual Abuse Prevention: A Study for Teenagers***, by Marie Fortune. New York: United Church Press, 1984. A five-session course of study for 12 to 18 year olds. Suggests ways of self protection. Recommended by several denominations.

child to talk about his or her secret. Simple illustrations.

***No More Secrets for Me***, by Oralee Wachtder. Waltham: Little Brown, 1982. Stories for six to ten year olds.

***Sexual Abuse, Alerting Kids to the Danger Zones***, by Joy Betty. Waco: Word, 1984. This beautifully illustrated book guides children toward assertive behavior as protection and safety from sexual abuse.

***Something Happened to Me***, by Phyllis E. Sweet. Racine: Mother Courage Press, 1533 Illinois St., Racine, WI 53405, 1981. Designed to be read by an adult to a child to encourage the

As years passed, the little spark began to dawn on the adult "little girl" until one day it reached her conscious mind. And with an inner joy suffusing her being she realized it wasn't lack of will or stupidity, for these didn't reflect in other areas of her life—other areas of her life where she remembered others calling her gutsy and looking to her for strength. No, what had happened a long time ago had chained her. Chained her creative, although culturally unacceptable, gifts. And chained (although this had not necessarily been desired by the two men) her ability to fight back. And she dreamed of going home. Dreams of going home to talk with two men who had loved her—but who had made a mistake.

In those dreams she carefully talked with them over a cup of coffee, and told them a story. One like this. And they caught on. They sat there astonished. And then reactions began to set in. Horror realizing what the seed they had planted had done, how it had affected girls they loved, how it had opened the way for monsters they had never envisioned. Oh my God! ran through their minds and wild ideas began to pour and, and, and... Suddenly quiet words of the now adult woman reached their minds. I love you. Love you. But you made a mistake. And now we must do something about it. Do something to make sure it never

Funny. Now both men could laugh with the adult woman. They had always loved her fire even though it wasn't "quite right."

And when this dream was shared with the other now adult woman, the tears flowed freely. Tears which gave birth to hope.

Amen!

The author wishes to remain anonymous.

by Ethel Y. Metzler

## What Do You Feel? What Do You Think? What Would You Do?

Here are eight vignettes, which point up situations that have happened to many of us. In the past we had to face them alone and make uncertain responses. Now, we can open up the topics these highlight, deal with our emotional reactions, and plan creatively should similar situations reoccur.

Use these for discussion in your family, at your church women's group meeting, or with a friend to formulate action plans, discover your values and beliefs, and learn what relevant information you may be missing. This could include 1) when you are required to report sexual abuse, incest, rape—and to whom; 2) at what age is sex play considered sexual abuse, incest, or rape? Call the Child Protective Agency to discover the answer.

### Vignette 1

As you quilt at a WMSC meeting, a woman across the quilt says she can't get her daughters to visit their grandfather. She further explains that the older girl hasn't been wanting to go for a long time. Now the youngest refuses. The girl's father is furious and is blaming this mother for influencing the daughters because she never liked his father.



happens again. We, that's right, WE, must speak the unspeakable so that some unknowing yet loving male-centered father or uncle doesn't make the same mistake with the girl he loves.

**Your Children Should Know: Personal Safety Strategies for Parents to Teach Their Children**, by Flora Colao and Tamar Honansky. New York: Harper and Row, 1988. Action-oriented prevention ideas. Highly recommended by *Parents* magazine.

**Come Tell Me Right Away**, by Linda Tscherhart Sanford. Lebanon: New Victorian Printing Collective, 1982. A book to help children know what to report to adults.

**The Happy Bear Project**, Kansas Committee for the Prevention of Abuse, 435 S. Kansas Ave., Second Floor, Topeka, KS 66603. A program for preschoolers teaches them about touch and how to protect themselves from sexual assault. Available on video. Widely used.

**Take Care With Yourself**, a coloring book that makes feelings understandable to children and explains abuse.

#### Video

**Better Safe Than Sorry II**, 14 minutes, Failfair Communications, Box 1728, 10900 Ventura Blvd., Studio City, CA 91604. Outstanding resource for use in the elementary grades.

**Strong Kids—Safe Kids**, 1984, 42 minutes (Available at many video stores.) Entertaining (stars Henry Winkler) as well as educational. Designed to be watched by parents and their children (ages 3 to 12).

**Touch**, 32 minutes, MTI Teleprograms. All about touching, good and bad. For all age levels.

#### Vignette 2

Your family wants your sister, who is developmentally disabled, to become a member of a community program. She would work in a sheltered workshop and live in a group home. She refuses and hasn't been able to give your family an understandable reason for her obstinacy. You decide to meet with her alone and talk about fears. At the end of your conversation she says she is afraid. She has heard the same thing could happen there as happened when she went to Uncle Clyde's house. With careful assurance that it is okay to talk to you, you persuade your sister to tell you what happened. She says that he "did it" over and over again. She warns you never to tell mom, because she tried to tell mom and mom doesn't believe her. Mom is Uncle Clyde's sister.

#### Vignette 3

By the way your minister and his wife lead out in prayer in your small group, you feel that something tragic, and probably something sexually tragic has happened in the church family. When you comment privately to the minister's wife, she lets you know further that it has been reported to them that a father in your church has been involved sexually with his daughters. She requests your prayers for her husband as he counsels this family. She warns you not to tell anyone what she has told you.

#### Vignette 4

Your 14-year-old son tells you that, from the way one of his friends is bragging, he thinks his friend is having sex with his sister. The sister is 12; her brother is 15. The family attends your church.

#### Vignette 5

You overhear your daughter, 16 years of age, and her friends talking about sex. What catches your attention is a statement about a relative's husband "You know how he is..." Later you talk with your daughter. She seems surprised that you don't know that he makes advances to the young girls in the church, even his nieces.

#### Vignette 6

After a celebration with your extended family, your 13-year-old daughter seems withdrawn. You try to find out what's troubling her. She doesn't want to talk and acts mad toward you. Time goes by. Before the next family gathering your daughter tells you she won't go. After much

persuading on your part, she tells you that an older cousin lured her into his car and raped her last year at the family gathering.

#### Vignette 7

Your daughter, 13 years old, complains that her next older brother, who is 16, walks into the bathroom when she is using it. She asks you to stop him. You tell her she is old enough to fend for herself and fight her own battles and to lock the door. She stomps out of the room in a flare of anger.

#### Vignette 8

Because of an unexpected turn of events, your husband offers to do the shopping. You had added tampons to the shopping list when your daughter asked you to get them for her. When your husband comes home from the store he is outraged at you and your daughter saying that no daughter of his is going to use tampons before marriage. He all but accuses your daughter of being immoral. She storms out of the room crying.

*What do you feel? What do you think? What would you do?*

by Ethel Y. Metzler

## Family Dynamics of Incest

Children hold little power to withhold consent from would-be sexual abusers, particularly in the family. For children, family forms the matrix for their lives. Outside the family, a child may question an unfamiliar experience, feel guarded, and be on alert for the unusual or harmful. Inside the family, the child feels at home, and should be safe.

Child sexual abusers outside the family typically pay attention to acquiring children's confidence, stimulating their curiosity, rewarding their trust—then they start the sexual abuse. Inside the incestuous family, children are expected to obey their elders, who then take advantage of

**An Ounce of Prevention, 1982, 18 minutes, Agency for Instructional Technology, Box A, Bloomington, IN 47402. Three videos with instruction manual for three age groups: 4-8, 9-11, 12-14.**



**Partners in Healing, 43 minutes, Independent Video Services, 401 E. 10th Ave., Suite 160, Eugene, OR 97401. A valuable new aid to help couples overcome the repercussions of childhood incest.**

the children's desire to please and be pleased and strong inclination to trust.

In our families we receive whatever care and attention comes our way. The same is true in an incestuous family. Not knowing that the form of attention they are getting might be inferior, children take what is given to them. Fair or not, adequate or not, nurturing or not—what the child receives that child cannot fight with—even when s/he hurts. S/he can only cry, try not to be available to the abuser, plead for help, and/or pretend what is happening is not happening. The response the child gets in return s/he does not control.

Persons intent on sexual use of children outside the family tend to choose children uncertain of their parents whereabouts, indefinite about return from work, and free to spend unaccounted-for time outside the home.

Inside the home, adults (brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles, aunts, grandparents) bent on sexual contact carefully maneuver and manipulate circumstances to get moments apart with the children they have in mind to relate to sexually. For example, a man recounted the story of his Mennonite father-in-law, who used his immobility due to an accident to lure his grandchildren into the trap of his sexual fantasies and actions. He got his granddaughters to sit on his lap, then he tickled them, later fondling and gently stimulating them while he got an erection. The mother only discovered what was going on when the older daughter would not visit grandfather or go to any family function. Questioned, this older daughter hesitantly revealed what had happened. When the youngest daughter was questioned, she told about Grandpa having something hard in his pants and rubbing her around on it when he put her on his lap. She did not like it, but could not get off his lap until he had put her down.

A Mennonite woman told me her older brother invited her to a secret hideaway in the woods. This felt like an honor for her as a third grader. There these brothers sexually used this nine-year-old. They introduced her to male masturbating. Sometimes it was done on her, sometimes it was done on top of her, sometimes she had to rub or suck them. From a sheltered Mennonite home, she did not have words for what was happening. She did have instructions never to tell because, "Mom wouldn't understand and Dad didn't want girls to know these things."

Each of us lives in a sexual body. The many feelings we experience growing up with family members of the same and opposite gender can confuse and puzzle us. A family that chooses to talk about sexuality and the emotional feelings of its members provides a safe haven for the developing psyche of the child. A family which refuses to discuss feelings as well as educate about sexual development and the gender and status boundaries that are important in families, may find the sexual feelings going underground and coming out in inappropriate and experimental ways.

We can reduce the possibility of incest occurring in our families by agreeing on some activities:

- 1) Hold ourselves as women and our menfolk accountable to talk about sexuality and sexual matters with respect for the needs of children and adolescents.
- 2) Teach about the effects of adolescent and adult behavior on children. Preach about incest and against the sexual abuse of children.
- 3) Take full responsibility as women to act as whole persons loved by God, respected by Christ, and expect men to treat us and our children similarly.
- 4) Make it possible for children to report physical, emotional, and sexual violence by bringing these topics into church life.
- 5) Work for broad attitude change seeking to release both men and women from the oppression of sexism and silence around sexual matters.
- 6) Take the risk to articulate our discomfort about the use of pornography and sexist jokes and to tell our stories of incest and sexual abuse.
- 7) Pledge ourselves to teach our children about sexual matters and to talk about sexual feelings in the family.

#### **You Can Make A Difference**

- 1) Arrange for informed speakers to make presentations about incest to groups in which you have membership.
- 2) Follow up these speeches with discussions about what your church or organization can do.
- 3) Encourage your church and school boards to take positive steps to include prevention education for all children from elementary to high school.

The following three videotapes are available from Bridgework Theater, 113 1/2 E. Lincoln Ave., Goshen, IN 46526:

*Little Bear*, 20 minutes. A play dramatizing the trauma of sexual abuse. K-7 grades.

*Out of the Trap*, 40 minutes. A play for Jr. and Sr. high students. Gives information and skills for the prevention of sexual abuse through increased understanding of personal rights and boundaries.

*The Trial, the Mark, the Voice*, 60 minutes. A community education play that put incest on trial. Actors interpret two cases, one father/daughter incest, the other a young boy and his "big brother" friend.

#### Other Resources

*Working Together*, the newsletter of the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 1914 N. 34th St., Suite 105, Seattle, WA 98103. \$10 annually for four issues.

Channing L. Bete Co., 200 State Rd., S. Deerfield, MA 01373, produces scriptographic booklets related to family violence, incest, and child abuse. Free samples available. Excellent for distribution in churches.

- 4) Check with your community, church, and school librarians about books on incest and sexual abuse for both adults and children. Request important additions on the topic.
- 5) Encourage friends, relatives, family members to read about the problem.
- 6) At your church post programs of training and education events on sexual abuse. Attend and encourage your pastor to attend.
- 7) Become familiar with your community's resources for therapy for incestuous families and for adults who experienced incest during childhood.
- 8) Refer families and survivors only to therapists, programs, and support groups qualified to provide incest resolution therapy.
- 9) Write to newspapers. Respond to reports of incest and sexual abuse, giving your support for family treatment programs for families and offenders amenable to treatment.
- 10) Write letters of support to prosecutors, judges, and child protective services to exert their influence and power to get offenders, amenable to treatment, and families who have experienced incest into treatment programs.
- 11) Lobby your legislators for appropriate legislation that promotes rehabilitation for incest offenders, amenable to treatment.
- 12) Encourage your church to provide training to educate parents about the sexual development of their children.
- 13) Encourage the formation of men's and women's small groups which can provide safety for discussion of sexuality or for opportunity to process growing-up experiences, and build trust among church members.
- 14) Encourage your YWCA to develop women's and men's support centers. Become active in your center.
- 15) Become involved with your community's efforts to respond to sexual abuse awareness emphasis month, April.
- 16) Support organizations such as Children's Legal Action Fund which help incest victims and their parents.
- 17) Discuss the situations presented in this issue about family sexuality. Be honest as you respond to the three questions: What do you think, What do you feel, What would you do?
- 18) Discuss with other women experiences in your growing up which were — or came near to being—sexual abuse, whether within or without the family.
- 19) Present a resolution in your church and church conference that addresses the problem of sexual abuse within our families.
- 20) Volunteer to be a member of a conference task force on domestic violence to assist your conference to be committed to work on this and related problems of family violence.

## Letters

- How can one effectively respond to being misrepresented in print? I've pondered: Does raising the issue publicly help or hinder? I refer to a quote on p. 12 of *Report* No. 81. Unknown to the *Report* editor, who took that news item from another source, was the fact that I had twice tried to correct the statement that two editors proceeded to ignore. Perhaps an issue of *Report* should expose the dilemmas that women writers have faced with editors.

My statement should have been: "What struck me the most was the contrast between the individualism among western women and Indian women who work for the masses who are in need." I do not oppose western women's working for their own upgrading because, on the whole, that is also still needed. What I am discontent with is church women (and men) who have so absorbed western individualism that they deny the need for persistent work alongside people deprived of justice/wholeness/well-being. Statements like "I don't have a problem," or "those who don't think they have enough opportunity..." or "I will never be a feminist" (one who basically wishes for equal opportunity for women and men) reflect an individualism that I did not experience among women of India who were so dedicated to those less fortunate than themselves.



**Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Resources** is published by the **National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse**, 332 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 1250, Chicago, IL 60604-4357. A comprehensive guide listing over 180 books, films, videos, plays, and curricula.

**Canadians can contact the MCC Task Force on Domestic Violence, Winnipeg, for additional resources available in Canada.**

**National Child Abuse Hotline Number**

1-800-422-4453 or 1-800-4-A-CHILD

On call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, counselors provide information, referral, and crisis counseling for child victims and family members. This hotline, established in 1982, by Childhelp USA,

receives more than 100,000 calls a year. For more information, call Childhelp National Headquarters, 6463 Independence Ave., Woodland Hills, CA 91367. Phone: (818) 347-7280.

Illustrations in this issue were drawn by Teresa Pankratz of Chicago, IL and Cathy C. Coon of Newton, KS. Please do not reproduce without permission.

My other frustration in seeing this news item excerpt reprinted in the *Report* was that another Mennonite, Carolyn Heggen from New Mexico, also deserves recognition for having been with the study-tour group to India. But she is not an alumnae of Goshen college so was not noted in that school's *Bulletin* from which the news item was drawn. Hopefully, the two of us will still find time/occasion to report some of our learnings for Mennonite readership.

—Dorothy Yoder Nyce, Goshen, Ind.

- The *Report* is well-written and interesting and I enjoyed reading it. Thank you for sending me the two issues, but I must decline your thoughtful offer to put me on your mailing list because with two young children at home I find it challenging just to keep up with my goal of trying to read a chapter of the Bible each day and in the meantime the pile of "literature to read" under my bed keeps growing.

*REPORT* is published bimonthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committee strives to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures in which men and women can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in *REPORT* do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committee on Women's Concerns.

*REPORT* edited by Christine Wenger Nofsinger. Layout by Sandra Unruh. Correspondence and address changes should be sent to Chris Nofsinger, Editor, MCC, Box M, Akron, PA 17501.

U.S. residents may send subscriptions to the above address. Canadian residents may send subscriptions to MCC Canada, 134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg, MB R3T 5K9. A donation of \$10.00 per year per subscription is suggested.

I have a neighbor who is a battered wife. I had felt so frustrated and limited in working with her and listening to her terrifying stories until I came across the *Purple Packet*. Since getting it I have shared it with several others who I would like to purchase it for.

It is my intention to show the packet to any ministers in our town that express interest in it. But it also hit me—that when ministers use it it's too late. Women need to hear about it before they make the mistake of marrying a batterer. So I thought of the home economics teacher in our high school. She has impressed me many times with the common sense, useful to every day living lessons, she has given to her classes. I am planning to show her one and hopefully she'll use it for classes. I figure, even if she could save just one girl in each graduating class, it's worth her time.

MCC has produced an excellent resource and I thank you! God bless you as you work to help others.

—Anonymous

*Ed. note: The MCC Domestic Violence Task Force has prepared the Purple Packet to assist the church in breaking its silence about abuse in families. Single copies of the packet are available at \$5.00 each and five or more copies at \$4.00 each. Contact the MCC Akron or Winnipeg office (addresses on back page) or the MCC Office of Criminal Justice, 107 West Lexington, Elkhart, IN 46516.*



**Mennonite  
Central  
Committee**

21 South 12th Street  
Box M  
Akron, PA  
17501

21 S. 12th St., Box M

**PAID**

Akron, PA 17501